History a. When were you founded?

The Rochester – Finger Lakes chapter first met in late 2007 and approved our by-laws in 2008.
In 2007 as a CSEA member I was instrumental in the **procurement of Domestic Partner benefits** through our unit at Monroe Community College. Later I became Unit VP and with a couple allies extended the push for DP benefits to all county employees. The impetus to **create a PAW chapter came from our failure to get domestic partner benefits available for all Monroe County workers**. As individuals, our legislative lobbying and appeals to union contract negotiators got no response so it was apparent that we needed more leverage. We needed a credible union-based structure to educate and influence unions from within. We went looking for PAW.

b. How has your chapter grown / changed since then?

As we built the chapter we learned by trial & error and were blessed with some unexpected mentors and supporters. Today we are structurally sound, have a solid core of active members **and our officers have cross trained skill sets**. We are now **recognized as a "go to" resource in Western NY for LGBT workplace concerns** both within the union family and in the broader community.

c. What are the major issues / campaigns your members are engaged in?

In terms of major issues we have addressed, first we **worked at achieving integration and acceptance** in the labor community.

When other county labor units refused to advocate for DP benefits they claimed it was because they **"didn't have any gay members ".** Our response: if you don't have any out gay employees it probably means they work in a hostile environment and perhaps the union presents as unsupportive too...which was the case. We needed to create visibility among closeted LGBT workers .
Our **first outreaches to gay labor were failures**. One well-advertised program we set up had 4 significant speakers and only 3 attendees. Flyers were ignored and no one wanted electronic newsletters**. How do you engage closeted workers?** Frustrated, we were at risk of giving up the effort until we turned to one of our mentors Scott Fearing, program director of the Gay Alliance. Scott conducts workshops on **the stages of development of sexual identity using the Cass Model and addresses the impact that varying stages of self acceptance has on an individual in the workplace.** We had to factor in the realities of being LGBT in unsupportive workplaces and meet people where they were.

That changed our entire focus. Scott convinced us that we first needed to create a safe environment in the union and in the workplace before people would come out. And that starts at the top. We conducted **Union Certification training** for union leadership hitting topics like the Cass Model, being closeted, heterosexism and domestic partner language.

We stopped using the "LGBT" acronym as most straight people did not know what it stood for. We generally say "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" to increase awareness & listener comfort with the different sub-sets of the queer community.

My wife who is also a PAW member and I made the **conscious effort to be as out & visible as humanly possible** to project a constant gay presence in union gatherings and to demonstrate that it was "safe" to be out. We made sure people knew where we were coming from immediately. Anne claims at that stage we introduced ourselves as "**Hi I'm lesbian and my name is Bess** " maybe not... but I was intentionally mentioning "My wife Anne" at every opportunity. It was occasionally uncomfortable but invariably we would be approached after a union event by someone LGBT or a family member of someone gay.

Eventually we realized we must become part of the power structure to make change. Developed strong relationships with the local labor council and area labor federation. The FIRST thing I did was ask my Local CSEA president if I could **become a delegate to the labor council for CSEA** and then when I was comfortably accepted there advocated to present

a **report as the PAW President and been on the agenda ever since**. Later I became a CSEA Local President and also became part of the Rochester Labor Council Executive Board. **This process was probably one of the smartest things I could have done.** These positions created venues from which I could educate leadership and build relationships within CSEA and all the unions in Rochester. Monthly I use **colorful picture-filled** reports to share all we do. My "folksy" monthly reports to the labor council have been the most effective way to do education on various LGBT topics. When I reported that my wife had gotten arrested at the White House for DADT the labor council applauded.
I also use humor to change hearts and minds... works far better than indignation & lectures.
Tell Chaz Bono story.

Union leadership became supportive but that did not mean that the average worker was on board. I **drank beer with blue collar union guys for a year** to form relationship. After enough joking around we finally started having serious conversations about LGBT issues. **Patience is essential** – progress initially comes in baby steps.

One smart thing we did early on was to award our first "True Colors" award To Jim Bertolone the President of the Rochester Labor Council who had always been a personal supporter of LGBT equality. Not only did it draw a broad range of unions to our first annual dinner and send a clear message that a very respected union leader was an advocate, but it seemed to motivate Jim to a higher level of involvement with us.

Once fully integrated into the labor community we were able to push the envelope – for instance on the **One Nation March** in Washington we for the first time challenged local organizers who ignored our concerns as a minority group. It was uncomfortable for everyone concerned but the local organizers got a clear **message that we expected our friends to act in a fair manner** and it never happened again.

The big payoff for the years of relationship cultivation came with **the fight for marriage equality in NY**. Every union in Rochester except one we had not worked with, actively lobbied for marriage equality. Letters, calls, personal lobby appeals, op-ed pieces. And finally **GOP Senator Alesi came out publically for marriage** and tipped the scales for marriage success.

Without question the support of labor in Rochester was owed to years of work by PAW. PAW also was part of the coordinated coalition effort in Rochester that **collected 1000 letters a week** and generated over 300 weekly phone calls from the public.

2) a. What organizing /outreach approaches have you used to maintain a diverse blend of unions?

We built diversity into our chapter as we **developed relationships with other unions**. The best way was simply to show up and **support other unions** who were going through budget cuts, contract problems or other workplace issues. Wearing PAW t-shirts or carrying PAW signs we attend pickets and rallies, volunteered for their canvasses and phone banks, and notably made colorful media-attracting signs as they requested. We provided IBEW hand-painted signs for their labor day protest and **immediately they became an organizational member of Pride at Work**. With the RWDSU **Mott's Strike** we walked the picket, regularly took out food, supported financially and wrote several published articles and of course made signs. The blue collar Mott's strikers marched with us in the Pride parade and handed out 5000 palm cards. **The PAW float won an award that year** where we donated half our winnings to the Motts strikers and the other half to cover our expenses.

To really get our name out to rank & file members **we take digital pictures at union events and immediately publish on facebook / PAW blog.** People look for the photos & tag themselves – draws them to your sites.

And we offer workshops that will draw a wide range of people. Especially popular is a workshop on "visibility, messaging and sign-making". We open it up to community groups also as a way to build alliances.

b. How do you recruit from different constituency groups?

We believe it **is vital to actively engage diverse constituencies** – youth, people of color, transgender, private & public sector. Our **meeting attendees typically include gay, bi and straight, retired, disabled, black, white and Hispanic, folks from 5-6 unions plus a couple non-union people.** We work with several transgender individuals within the community, though they are not paid PAW members. As outreach to the Trans community we have provided refreshments for **Transgender Community dances and lobbied & collected letters for GENDA** with coalition partners like ESPA.

We have encouraged several members to **also become members of CBTU** and are currently **working with CBTU on GOTV for the City of Rochester.** We have our first meeting next week.

To **engage younger people** we support **Next Generation United** initiatives , made decorations for their events as well as had them march with us in the Pride Parade. We helped local young progressive groups **Civil Rights Front and Campus Out get buses for the National Equality March and co-sponsored workshops on Civil Disobedience** with them. We mentored their first direct action protest at City Hall. The Gay Alliance Youth have helped us make LGBT rally signs.

Several PAW members are part of the Gay Alliance **Speakers Bureau. We speak at local colleges** on LGBT equality and workplace rights. Anne & I speak on **"Policy and Protest"** every semester at SUNY Brockport.

We have had failures – supported an African American church initiative about public defender appointment only to be rejected at one point because we were gay. Now we **are starting to collaborate with the one open & affirming black LGBT church in Rochester.**

To get into the wider community **we collaborate with progressive community groups who spread the word about PAW.** Like with the union outreach we always wear our t-shirts, bring a sign and then post a picture when we support these groups. We co-sponsor progressive events, talks, educational venues put on by community organizations. Image Out Film Festival, labor film festival, set up information tables at church events. **We buy ad space and donate raffle baskets** to organizations that we want as allies. We set out literature for other organizations when we have events – they notice....

To connect with **retired union members** we set up a trellis at the Rainbow SAGE Seniors Dances and took pictures...gathering email addresses to distribute photos electronically...we got a good database.

Because we are so OUT and visible and have networked to make our name known, **we have become a credible "resource"** and we value that designation. **We handle all referrals about any LBGT issues** that cross our path – immigration, school bullying – We make sure the person's problem gets addressed by someone...even if we can't do anything. **We have Senator Gillibrand's office on speed dial.**

This one we hate: We do any & all media opportunities even if the "good speakers" are not available...getting the PAW name on TV or in the paper is a gift in terms of building credibility. Just the other day I was interviewed for Don't Ask Don't Tell for television.

One important thing to note – we have not been "numbers oriented" in our recruitment. We by necessity have been "action oriented" since we started and our growth has been more from **"attraction rather than promotion"**. We realized that a small number of people could create great change and took that as our priority. Had we focused on numbers of members especially at the beginning when we were just learning about **creating safe environments** we would have felt we were failures. Instead we focused on change and were instrumental in getting the first GOP legislator on board for Marriage Equality in NY. We count chapter strength in terms of the change we have fostered.

3) How do you support & develop new leaders

Within the chapter we **develop leadership by encouraging everyone to participate**. Discussions are time limited but every opinion is welcomed. Plus we think the best way to empower members is to **give everyone a job** that makes them feel part of the team. We break up tasks into steps that allow everyone to participate. We often use "arts and crafts" preparation to get new people to contribute for the first time as we work on parade floats or sign creation.

We are not large enough to have standing committees. Typically we have 1-2 point people responsible for an event or activity we take on and we work together as a group and by consensus. With that being said the president is given discretionary latitude in representing the chapter and serves as a "tie-breaker" as needed and free to speak on PAW's behalf.

We strongly encourage our members to attend the Gay Alliance Speakers Bureau training to learn the nuances of talking about GLBT issues, particularly involving terms around gender expression, identity and sexual orientation. This is a great confidence builder. We send people **to conferences and workshops** they are interested in & have them report back to the group. We've encouraged members to **join CBTU** and share their learning. In more than one circumstance we have **suggested people run for union office** and given them mentoring. We want people to share their successes and celebrate them.

4) What motivates people to come to meetings? What makes members come back a second, third time

We are small enough that a new face is a source of excitement and we really go out of our way to make everyone feel welcome. We **expect courtesy** during the meetings even when people disagree . We definitely **believe in direct dealing** and don't tolerate gossip or complaints about another member behind their back. Period.

We run tight meetings, start and end on time and follow Robert's Rules. We always announce meetings, have an agenda and minutes to review and include multiple educational handouts.

We start meetings with introductions and always include a period when people can report on LGBT activism they have been part of or events they want to promote. We try to make sure everyone shares at some point in the meeting and will call on quiet people.

One of the most useful practices we do as leadership is to consistently use the word "we" even when the task was done by myself for instance. This has several benefits:

- It defines the chapter as **a team rather than a hierarchy.**
- **It creates ownership** of the process in other members
- **It conveys size** and strength to outside contacts
- It minimizes negative interpersonal interactions based on **jealousy and power struggles** within the group and outside the group.

We learned not to pull at people and are careful **not to overcommit**. Our plans are based on member availability...for instance this year we had a float ready but did not use it on Labor Day because it would have strained people too much. We have created an environment where people will speak up and that prevents people from just disappearing.

We are **not always all business**. We bring snacks and cakes to celebrate special occasions. – periodically we meet out for a drink

5) Challenges & Next Steps

Todays challenges are twofold. First, success means that our **leadership people are far too busy** and wear lots of different hats. There is a temptation to **bypass some of the team-building methods** that provided success in the past and "just do it myself" to get things done. We also sometimes forget to have fun...

Plus we have hit the point when the strong team is diminishing by attrition...and **new energy is needed.** So a new member initiative is pending. We will be doing **a flashy PAW annual dinner in the spring** with entertainment and will have a PAW member social event this coming year.

In terms of **new initiatives**, we are starting **the education process on Transgender issues with union leadership**. There is much work to do **to create a supportive environment for transgender workers** who felt rejected on their jobs & betrayed by their unions in the past. **GENDA passage is a priority**. As well as assisting Buffalo in forming a new PAW Chapter.